

The Ballarat Naturalist

OCTOBER 2010



CHINCHILLA – ANN GET TOGETHER 2010 AUG 24 – SEPT 4

This was a most enjoyable and memorable event, amazingly well organised by a most hospitable and knowledgeable group of naturalists and their families and friends. Right from the first evening meeting it was evident that much thought and preparation had been done to make our experience as rich and comprehensive as possible.

We were supplied with a black carry bag containing our pre-ordered royal blue vests, a cap, a book called “Going Bush”, another called “Fungi out West – both excellent and published by the Chinchilla Nats and a folder



The BFNC Contingent
(All photos, unless otherwise stated, from Peter Dalman)



Climbing over the stile—in style at Wonga Hills..

containing Chinchilla information and a local publicity DVD. Also in our bags and immensely useful was a spiral bound A5 sized book. It began with local information and phone numbers and concluded with a participant list. For each day there was a page describing the trip, a map including distances and two pages left for us to

record personal observations. A district fold-out map made sense of the detailed daily maps. Around our necks dangled our names in plastic pockets, a one month membership card for the local RSL and colour-coded slips for each day. These were excellent. At a glance you knew pick-up times and locations for the duration of the day/evening and things you needed to take. Sometimes we were supplied with lunch, morning tea, dinner or supper so on those days you didn't need to pack your own.

We travelled each day on buses – usually large but sometimes small where demanded by terrain. This meant that we had the benefit of information and answers supplied by members leading excursions or people we picked up as we went. Sometimes there were people waiting for us at locations to guide us. Usually a support vehicle travelled with us or met us in case of unforeseen need, or to greet us with delightful hospitality. Sometimes we were met, right out in the bush, with billy tea, scones, cakes, slices or biscuits. At these locations, the Chinchilla people had also set up a toilet tent and hand washing facilities – much appreciated by all. Some days included walks along “tracks” marked by blue plastic (blue



Morning Tea in the bush.

stands out in the bush). Along these tracks, numbered pegs corresponded with sheets given to us to identify plants generally unfamiliar to us. At "Wonga Hills" cattle property the owner has fenced off a big area to allow this to be preserved but they wanted us to see this remnant softwood scrub and a big rock used by Aborigines to sharpen tools. No problem! Build an excellent stile and slash a track, complete with blue ribbons. On this property on a different site a bottle tree had died and collapsed enabling us to see the inside lacy wood. On other occasions if we needed to climb through a fence such as to look at the Chinchilla White Gums – *Eucalyptus argophloia*, a shaped plank held wires apart and carpet tied over barbed wire solved that problem.

One of the things I loved about this get together was the wide range of our experiences. Of course the natural world was the focus but sometimes natural and social history blended, sometimes current "issues" were important, art and photography were included, farming and associated industries such as cotton,



The Leichhardt Tree

chickpeas, leucaena, watermelons, sorghum and other grain crops, and timber harvesting, mostly cypress pine, *Callitris glaucophylla*, but also some spotted gum, *Corymbia variegata*. We now recognise the Brigalow trees, *Acacia harpophylla*, along roadsides with their silvery foliage. Much has been cleared as



Handos Wattle, *Acacia handonis*

Brigalow country is fertile. Our tour of the Kogan Creek power station, built in 2007 and now generating 750 megawatts of electricity was excellent "guided" by Ivan Mapp, the manager. Coal seam gas, and the conflicting local thoughts about it, was explained. We saw rail lines being built to haul black coal to Gladstone and the drastic effect mining this will



We visited two beautiful wild flower areas . This beautiful *Grevillea Longistyla* was commonly seen.
(Photo: Val Hocking)

have, the potential loss of productive black soil, flat plains. We heard of threats to the water supply and indeed the artesian basin. We saw how Chinchilla is rapidly growing and changing with a different population mix – new houses and dongas being built all over the place and mining, power company

or building vehicles all along the streets complete with orange lights and reversing beepers.

Ludwig Leichhardt spent time around this area from Jimbour House (beautiful and fascinating) to many creek or bush sites. The Chinchilla Nats have published a book about this famous explorer and as we travelled around, quite often a leader showed us a spot pertinent to his story. One day Harold Rennick took some of us to a tree blazed by Leichhardt – we would never have found this without guidance. Leichhardt left Jimbour House in October 1844 on his expedition to Port Essington (near Darwin).

I enjoyed meeting Val Hando, a lively senior Chinchilla lady who has published several books and has a wattle named after her, Handos wattle, *Acacia handonis*, only found on “Handonis Hill”. Val sent a specimen to the Herbarium and was delighted to have this rare wattle named after her. We found it still flowering but past its best. It is a beautiful bright yellow wattle with large, fluffy balls. Val accompanied us on several trips and her botanical knowledge was amazing.

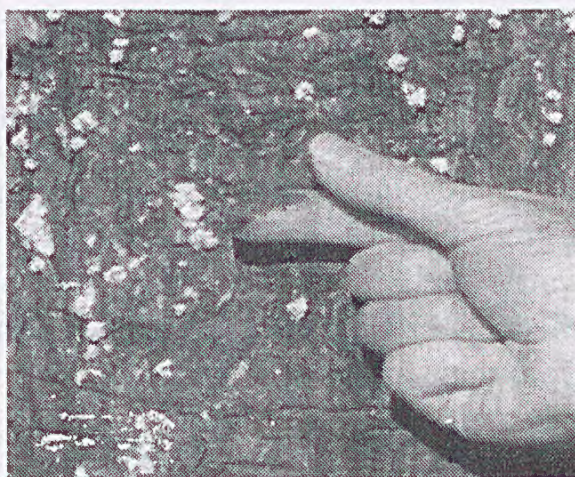
Our day visit to Myall Park was full of botanical interest and if you are ever able to visit, I suggest you do. There



We were treated to billy tea and scones, jam and cream in the bush on at least two occasions. (Photo: Val Hocking)

is accommodation and camping. This was established by David Gordon A.M. and concentrates on Australian plants from arid, semi-arid and dry sub-tropical regions of Australia. Dave envisioned creating new hybrids and was rewarded by three grevilleas which he named after his daughters – Robin, Sandra and Merinda. Of these *Grevillea* Robin Gordon is a best seller in nurseries. We saw the original plant and the likely parent plants as well as some of the parents of the others. We were welcomed here with morning tea provided by “Friends of Myall Park” and led by several enthusiastic “Friends”. Also here is a gallery, home to magnificent botanical paintings by Dorothy Gordon and currently exhibiting photos of Brigalow birds, mounted to support the launch of the very new Brigalow Birds book and DVD.

Botanical highlights included our trip to the Waaje Wildflower Scientific Area, an isolated “island” on the crest of the Great Dividing Range. Some plants are only found here including *Eucalyptus pachycalyx* var. *waajensis* and *Acacia barakulensis* and other rare plants occur such as *Grevillea longistyla*, Yellow calytrix, *Calytrix*



Cochineal Insect

gugruldensis, and Plunket mallee, *Eucalyptus curtisii*. Also on this day some brave souls climbed two impressive wooden fire towers – one 26 metres and one 40 metres.

Birds were not forgotten, always part of excursions and with two early morning specific bird trips. We were pleased to see some sightings of bustards, blue-faced honeyeaters were popular at Chinchilla weir, white breasted sea eagles were sighted as well as many more birds. Even my list would be reasonably long and I’m sure other lists would be impressive.

Even astronomy was included with a night visit to a district property which seemed dark when we arrived. Frank Truscott guided our binoculars all over the sky which gradually lightened over Chinchilla and Dalby as our eyes adjusted. Usually Frank, a forester, guided us somewhere like the Barakula Forest.

Prickly pear devastated vast areas of Queensland in the 1920s causing farmland to be useless with some forced to walk off and abandon properties. Chinchilla was in the heart of this pear ravaged country but after much experimentation and disappointing failure *Cactoblastis*

cactorum caterpillars, imported from South America, were bred and distributed from a local "Bug Farm" on a property named The Shanti". These arrested the spread and eventually the land was able to be reclaimed. We were taken to The Shanti to see just completed photographic panels telling about this brilliant rescue. A local hall near Chinchilla at Boonarga honours this Catoblastis caterpillar. Today, tree pear is fairly common. This maintains a food supply for cactoblastis and also for coccinea beetle (*Dactylopius coccus*). These are the beetles from which cochineal used to be made. In some places white "fluff" appears on tree pears. When you rub it you end up with red fingers, just the colour cochineal was.

Our day trip to the Bunya Mountains was another good excursion seeing of course the magnificent Bunya pines, enjoying an easy walk through labelled trees, scrub turkey, female satin bower bird in bower, an excellent small museum, king parrots and crimson rosellas waiting in vain to be fed, a green catbird, possibly two and scones made for us with bunya nuts and wattle seeds in the cream. I bought frozen bunya nuts and as per recipe sheet, later boiled these for 30 minutes before Peter had to extract them from their hard shells. They were quite nice to eat.

Night meetings were held most alternate nights in three different venues to spread the business and supper followed them all. We saw Geoff Lay's fungus talk, orchids, fossils, local plants and birds, Tony Moxon's cypress pine timber mill issues and of course the night sky. We saw and did things not even mentioned but this is already long enough. Seven of us went and we all enjoyed it very much. We look forward to Canberra in October 2012. The gathering was delightfully concluded with a campfire dinner. This had been prepared by four members – Beryl and Harold Rennick and Heather and John Mason. We were treated to beef stew, potatoes, damper, apple crumble, plum duff and custard, all cooked in camp ovens or a huge saucepan and washed down with billy tea as well as other favoured beverages. Speeches of thanks and farewell were made, including, Leo our bus company owner and fearless driver and also Dick Southcombe for beginning the ANN gatherings back in July 2000 in Central Australia.

This team of Chinchilla Nats led by the extremely competent and friendly Kath Truscott, president Ross Tait, Gary, Frank and all the others provided us with priceless opportunity for which we are truly grateful.

Claire and Peter Dalman

EXCURSION TO CLUNES FOREST

On a fine cold morning, nine members headed North to our August excursion to the Clunes forest. Pools of water were lying in some paddocks after recent rain. We entered the Clunes forest from the northern end of Fells Gully road. The main tree species in this area were Grey Box *Eucalyptus baueriana*, Yellow Gum *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* and a dense understorey of Golden Wattle *Acacia pycnantha*. This area was burnt in a bushfire in the late 1980s. At our first stop John was hoping to see some bird species that he had seen previously, but birds were scarce. Maybe the brisk North wind encouraged the birds to move away from the forest edge. Species that we did see included the Red Wattlebird, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, Australian Raven, Brown Treecreeper, Grey Thrush, Musk Lorikeet and Spotted Pardalote. Many fruiting bodies of fungi species had now faded to a similar biscuit colour. One species that had not yet faded was one of the Boletes. This species had a convex, dark brown cap, about 100mm in diameter, on a bulbous stem. The minutely pored surface underneath was a fawn colour with a reddish tinge. It was possibly one of the *Tylopilus* species.

After a cuppa we went looking for orchids. The first of the several greenhood orchid species we saw the Striped Greenhood *Pterostylis alata*. The plants that we saw did not have a rosette of leaves at the base of the stem. The flower of this species is a translucent white with dark green stripes and it curves forward at the tips and has a short point. The next orchid we saw was the Dwarf Greenhood *Pterostylis nana*, a common species which grow in colonies. The slender stem to 150mm, arising from a basal rosette of ovate stalked leaves, bears a single erect, shiny, hooded flower. This flower is white, with green lines and markings. The lichenised fungi, Yellow Belly-buttons *Lichenomphalia chromacea* were common in this area.

We continued along Fells Gully road to an area that probably escaped the bushfire. There was more ground-cover here. Poa, Red-anthered Wallaby grass and *Xanthorrhoea minor* were noticed here. The Red Ironbark *Eucalyptus tricarpa* and Long-leaf Box *E. goniacalyx* were growing in the more fertile soils. We saw two more species of greenhood orchids. First was the Nodding Greenhood orchid *Pterostylis nutans*. John said that the large dark green leaves that form a rosette at the base of this species have a wavy margin. The Tall or Black-stripe Greenhood *Pterostylis melagramma* was the next orchid seen. There were several flowers on its

**SUBTROPICAL WOODLANDS IN ZIMBABWE AND NORTHERN AUSTRALIA -
SOME COMPARISONS**

**[FROM A TALK GIVEN AT MEMBERS NIGHT ON 6 AUGUST 2010 BY JOHN
PETHERAM]**

The notes are based on my impressions of remarkable differences between woodlands of northern Australia and Zimbabwe, when I arrived in the Kimberley from Africa about 30 years ago. Both regions are on the same latitude and the climate of the Zimbabwean lowveld is very similar to that of the Kimberley – hot, rainy summers and cooler dry winters.

Superficially, woodlands in the two regions look very similar in structure, and they even share some identical species, but closer examination reveals striking differences in ecology and composition. The first surprising feature of Australian vegetation is its evergreen habit, as most African subtropical trees drop their leaves in winter, which cuts down water loss. One theory is that Australian trees cannot ‘afford’ to be leafless at all, because of unreliable rainfall: they remain evergreen so they can take up water whenever it rains. Also, the rebuilding of leaf canopy each year would be too heavy a load for trees growing on Australia’s generally infertile soils. Consequently the leaves of Australian trees are extremely well adapted to water conservation in the dry season. The trees in both continents have extensive root reserves and other adaptations to fire – though there’s nothing to match the epicormic growth seen in Eucalypts.

In contrast to the dominance of Eucalypts in Australia, savannahs in Africa are often dominated by broad-leaved Leguminous tree species – such as *Bracystegia* spp. Another feature in Zimbabwe is the relatively high proportion of woodland plants (usually over 50%) that produce edible fruits – perhaps through their co-evolution with primates. However, it is notable that in parts of northern Australia where indigenous knowledge is available, the proportion of known usable plants is also high. A major advantage to amateur botanists in Africa is the relatively easy access to indigenous knowledge of plant names and uses: local people are always about in the bush, and good botanical dictionaries (vernacular to botanical names) can be extremely valuable.

The sight of Baobabs in northern Australia made me feel immediately at home, and seemed (I thought) to provide clear evidence of the Gondwanan connections between our two continents. But nothing is that simple: I learned later of evidence that shows Baobabs (*Bombacaceae*) do not have Gondwana origins – so must have arrived in Australia by other means.

Theories on their origin vary from trans-ocean fruit dispersal, to the transfer by humans crossing the ocean in high sided canoes. Such vessels are depicted in the Bradshaw cave paintings in the Kimberley, and baobab seeds are known to be high in the vitamin C that travellers would need on such long voyages. The mind boggles, but no other explanation has been found to date.



Adansonia digitata
Baobab fruit



Adansonia gregorii
- East and west Africa

Many plant families and genera do have ancient Gondwana origins – such as the Acacias and numerous grasses. However, Africa's Acacias are all fine-leaved and double thorned, while most Australian Acacias have phyllodes instead of leaves, and none are armed. The name of Kangaroo grass – originally *Themeda australis* - was changed to *Themeda triandra* in

the 1980s because no difference could be found within this grass, which grows naturally across Africa, Australia and India. Black spear-grass, the seeds of which prevent the rearing of woolled sheep in northern Australia, is the same species (*Heteropogon contortus*) that excludes long wool production from Africa. Some tree species (e.g. *Gyropcarpus africanus*) are common to both continents, while many genera have species that are so close in habit that they occupy seemingly identical niches in both subtropical regions.

While Africans notice a lack of spectacular mammal species in Australia, this first impression is soon replaced by a realisation that Australian woodlands support a fascinating range of nocturnal marsupials and other mammals, strange monotremes and a great diversity of reptiles and spectacular birds that will take a lifetime to study and learn.

John Petheram



Bradshaw Cave Painting of boat

Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat (FNCB) Risk Management Policy

This policy, adopted by the Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat from 2/7/2010, is to identify and minimise the potential risks to members and visitors who participate in the activities of the FNCB. This policy is not designed to restrict the enjoyment of members' participation in the activities of FNCB but to protect our group and its members in the event of any action being taken against FNCB, its officers, committee members, activity leaders or individual members. Awareness of the risk management policy will assist all members to take responsibility for their own and others safety.

A. Safety at Meeting Venues

The committee will:

1. Ensure that an accurate record of all members, guests, speakers attending meetings is kept and that this list is available in the case of an emergency.
2. Ensure all power leads, microphone cables and equipment are properly secured and covered in order to protect against the possibility of an accident.
3. Identify and report any repairs required to the committee so they may be dealt with promptly.
4. Ensure adequate provision is made for support and safety for members or guests with disabilities.
5. Ensure such items that may cause a tripping hazard are moved to avoid potential accidents.
6. Report and photograph any damage observed due to vandalism, burglary or attempted entry to the police and the venue manager. A detailed report should be made for insurance purposes.
7. Provide information about the next excursion to allow members to be prepared for the conditions.

Members will:

8. Need to be aware of the potential tripping hazards and avoid leaving handbags, briefcases, walking sticks and other personal items on the floor.
9. Take extra care in the kitchen or meeting room during the preparation and serving of supper.
10. Ensure they keep current relevant personal medical information and contact telephone numbers readily accessible on their person

or in handbags. In the event of emergency, valuable time will be saved by using such information. The responsibility for keeping the data current rests with the individual member. Personal emergency contact numbers should also be listed in a member's mobile phone address book under the acronym ICE – In Case of Emergency. This information is also required to be carried during excursions.

Emergency Action during the course of a meeting:

The Chairperson or delegate should:

1. Have immediate access to a mobile or landline telephone.
2. Identify an appropriate assembly point for use in case of a need to evacuate the building.
3. Ensure an orderly evacuation of the venue in case of fire or other incident to the assembly point.
4. Ensure all members and guests are accounted for at the evacuation point using the official attendance list.
5. Place a call to the appropriate Emergency Service, providing the precise nature of the emergency and the location of the meeting.
6. Liaise with Emergency Services personnel should they attend the venue.
7. Ensure that an incident report is completed and lodged with the club secretary who will then advise the committee (and the club's insurers if appropriate).

Where a member or guest has an accident, becomes ill or collapses during the course of a meeting:

The Chairperson or delegate should:

1. Seek immediate assistance from members qualified in the administration of First Aid (including CPR if required).
2. Place a call to Emergency Services providing the precise nature of the emergency and the location of the meeting/excursion, and the state of health of the patient should their condition require such action.
3. Ensure that the patient has ample space and that other members not involved in assisting the patient are moved away.
4. Ensure that all available information concerning the patient is available to the Emergency Service.
5. Ensure that the patient's nominated contact person is notified at the earliest possible opportunity.
6. Ensure that an incident report is completed and lodged with the secretary.

B. Safety during Excursions

Excursions are monthly, usually on the Sunday after the monthly meeting. Additional excursions are held from time to time. Excursions may be full day or afternoon excursions.

Excursion Leaders should:

1. Inform participants of the nature, length, duration of activities, including hazards such as steep slopes, slippery surface, mine shafts, etc. This should take place at the meeting prior to the excursions and before the excursion leaves the car park. Leaders of excursions should be particularly vigilant to observe the fitness ability of participants and encourage them to limit their activities to a suitable level. If an accident or injury occurs, guidelines should be followed and the accident reported on the appropriate form.
2. Not hesitate to cancel an excursion if the weather is unsuitable or becomes unsuitable. **On a day of Total Fire Ban excursions are cancelled**
3. Ensure the FNCR first aid kit accompanies the excursion leader or nominated member.
4. Check group attendance at strategic points in an excursion.
5. Ensure all participants sign the attendance book.

Members should:

6. Ensure they are familiar with the latest first aid treatment for snake, insect, leech and spider bites.
7. Ensure they are fit enough and understand the degree of difficulty of the excursion
8. Carry any medication if required.
9. Wear footwear and clothing suitable for the weather and activity and wear a hat and sunscreen.
10. Carry adequate snacks and water.
11. Stay in contact with the group. It is important that any member or guest participating in outings organised in the name of FNCR should stay in contact with the group and notify the leader if they have to leave early or return home via another route.
12. Ensure visitors are aware of the FNCR risk policy.
13. Ensure that they and any visitors are registered in the attendance book.
14. Not enter worksites or barricaded areas without proper authority to do so.

Convey rules.

The following rules will help everyone enjoy the outing and prevent cars being lost!

1. Assemble promptly at allocated departure point. If possible, share transport to reduce the length of convoy.
2. The leader should give an indication of the length of drive and the types of roads to be travelled.
3. Where possible the use of hand held radios for communication (one per car) is encouraged.
4. Follow the car in front at a safe, close distance.
5. Indicate well in advance of turning.
6. Allowing for road conditions keep the following car in sight. If the car following is not visible stop at a safe place on the roadside. This should bring the whole convoy to a halt.
7. At all intersections make sure the next car behind is following.
8. On major highways, it may not be safe to travel in a convoy. It is best to indicate a prominent meeting place e.g. Post Office, intersection, etc.
9. It is a good idea to appoint a "tail-end Charlie" who knows the route.
10. Only park in safe areas where approaching traffic has a clear view and there is enough room to allow all vehicles to get off the road..
11. If it is not safe to travel in convoy on a highway, indicate a meeting place e.g. town post office.
12. When the convoy leader stops and gets out of a car, quickly assemble and await information.
13. If the worst happens, and you become lost, just wait in a visible position. Someone will come looking for you.

Environmental Photography Workshops—Spring 2010

Alison Pouliot is presenting one day workshops exploring the major principles of camera operation and photographic technique for the photography of environmental subjects.

Requirements: Cameras (including battery charger and instruction manual if available), lunch and wet weather gear if necessary. **Cost:** \$75

Workshop Dates and locations—booking can be made directly with the venues.

Friday 8th Oct—Daylesford Neighborhood Centre, 13 Camp St.

Thursday 14th Oct—Creswick Neighborhood Centre, 19 Victoria St.

Further information and queries—Alison Pouliot on

or

CALENDAR 2010

OCTOBER

- Fri 1 Cathy Powers *Flora of Western Australia with emphasis on orchids*
- Sun 10 **(NOTE Date)** Excursion to *Brisbane Ranges* (Wildflower Show is biennial so not on this year.) John Gregurke, Club Member.
- October 16-19 SEANA Spring Camp hosted by Latrobe Valley FNC
- Sun 17 BEN activity—Planting along Winter Swamp, 2.00—5.00pm. Entry from Ring Rd. *Enquiries*, Hedley Thomson,
- Tue 26 Committee Meeting, -

NOVEMBER

- Fri 5 **Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture**
Tony Wilson, Naturalist and Photographer *Rivers to Nowhere*
- Sun 7 Excursion—*Mt Beckworth*, Carol Hall, Club Members

WANTED: Suggestions for speakers and excursions for 2011. Planning will soon be underway, so give your suggestions to a Committee member as soon as possible!

Committee

President..... Ms Elspeth Swan
 Vice-President..... Mr Greg Binns
 Secretary..... Mr John Gregurke
 Treasurer..... Mr Les Hanrahan

Mrs Claire Dalman	Mrs Carol Hall
Mr Peter Dalman	Mrs Val Hocking.....
Dr Frances Hanrahan.....	Ms Nina Netherway (editor)

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Website: www.ballarat.yourguide.com.au Click on *Community>Local Clubs> Environment*

Meetings are held at the Prince of Wales Park Clubrooms in Prince of Wales Park, Gillies St on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm.

Excursions: Leave from the carpark adjacent to BGS & BHS boatsheds at the south end of Forest St., Wendouree.

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